DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 459 634 FL 801 494

AUTHOR	Lems, Kristen
TITLE	Using Music in the Adult ESL Classroom. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Vocational and Adult Education (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-LE-01-03
PUB DATE	2001-12-00
NOTE	4p.
CONTRACT	ED-99-CO-0008
AVAILABLE FROM	National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education, 4646 40th Street NW, Washington, DC 20016. Tel: 202-362-0700; Web site: http://www.cal.org/ericcll. For full text: http://www.cal.org/ncle.DIGESTS.
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adults; *English (Second Language); Listening Skills; Literacy; *Music; Oral Language; Second Language Instruction; Second Language Learning; Skill Development; *Songs; *Teaching Methods; Vocabulary Development
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

Music can be used in the adult English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classroom to create a learning environment; to build listening comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing skills; to increase vocabulary; and to expand cultural knowledge. This digest looks briefly at research and offers strategies for using music in the adult ESL classroom. Specifically highlighted are using songs in instruction and strategies to use with songs, including listening and oral activities, reading and writing activities, vocabulary building activities, and cultural knowledge activities; and selecting music. (Contains 10 references.) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education) (Author/VWL)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 459 634

ERIC DIGEST

Using Music in the Adult ESL Classroom
ERIC Digest
EDO-LE-01-03

Kristin Lems, National-Louis University

December 2001

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

- ☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- ☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

National Center for ESL Literacy Education (NCLE)
Center for Applied Linguistics
4646 40th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20016

FL 801 494

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ERIC Digest

December 2001
EDO-LE-01-03

Using Music in the Adult ESL Classroom

Kristin Lems, National-Louis University

Music can be used in the adult English as a second language (ESL) classroom to create a learning environment; to build listening comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing skills; to increase vocabulary; and to expand cultural knowledge. This digest looks briefly at research and offers strategies for using music in the adult ESL classroom.

Research

Neurologists have found that musical and language processing occur in the same area of the brain, and there appear to be parallels in how musical and linguistic syntax are processed (Maess & Koelsch, 2001). In one study, college students demonstrated improved short-term spatial reasoning ability after listening to Mozart. This was dubbed the "Mozart effect" in the popular press (Rauscher, Shaw, & Ky, 1993).

Adult learners in South Africa, exposed to instrumental music during an intensive English course, showed benefits in language learning (Puhl, 1989). Many educators report success using instrumental music as a warm up and relaxation tool, as a background for other activities, and as the inspiration for writing activities (Eken, 1996).

Using Songs in Instruction

Most classroom music activities focus on lyrics. Educator Tim Murphey conducted an analysis of the lyrics of a large corpus of pop songs and found that they have several features that help second-language learners: They contain common, short words and many personal pronouns (94% of the songs had a first person, *I*, referent and are written at about a fifth-grade level); the language is conversational (imperatives and questions made up 25% of the sentences in the corpus); time and place are usually imprecise (except for some folk ballads); the lyrics are often sung at a slower rate than words are spoken with more pauses between utterances; and there is repetition of vocabulary and structures. These factors allow learners to understand and relate to the songs (Murphey, 1992). A further benefit of pop song lyrics is that their meanings are fluid, and, like poetry, allow for many different interpretations (Moi, 1994). Following are strategies to use with songs.

Listening and Oral Activities

Songs contextually introduce the features of suprasegmentals (how rhythm, stress, and intonation affect the pronunciation of English in context). Through songs, students discover the natural stretching and compacting of the stream of English speech. For example, the reduction of the auxiliary *have* to the sound /uv/ can be heard in the song by Toni Braxton "You've Been Wrong for So Long" (2000). Similarly, the change of word final *t* + word initial *y* to /ch/ can be heard in a line from the Tracy Chapman Song "All that You Have Is Your Soul" (1989), where the singer says, "Don't you eat of a bitter fruit." Moriya (1988) points out the value of using songs for pronunciation practice with Asian learners because of the many phonemic differences between Asian languages and English. However, students from any language background can benefit from a choral or individual reading of the lyrics of the songs mentioned above, practicing the natural reductions that occur in spoken English.

Students may summarize orally the action or theme of a song or give oral presentations about a song or musician, playing musical selections for the class. To involve the whole class, students can fill out response sheets about each presentation, answering questions about the featured topic, something new they learned, and something they enjoyed.

Reading and Writing Activities

Students can fill in the blanks before, during, or after listening to a song, and then check to see whether their word choices made sense semantically, even if they did not pick the exact word used. This helps build the important skill of forming hypotheses based on context (predicting). This activity, called cloze, is usually created by deleting words at predetermined intervals, e.g., every 5th or 7th word. However, words can be deleted instead to practice a target grammar point, such as past tense verbs, prepositions, or compound nouns, or to identify key words (Griffee, 1990). For example, in the popular Enya song "Only Time" (2001), the auxiliary "can" could be omitted. ("Who can say where the road goes, where the day flows, only time. And who can say if your love grows, as your heart chose, only time.")

One popular activity is to cut the lyrics into lines and have students put them in the correct order as they listen to the song. This can be done individually or in small groups. It may be necessary to play the song several times. After the lines of the song have been put in order, the song can be played once more as students read or sing along. Alternatively, the class can be divided into teams with identical sets of strips and compete to see which group can put the strips in the correct order first.

For short songs, students can work in small groups to write the words of a song. The process of putting the lyrics together as a group involves making decisions about word order, verb tense, and parts of speech. It also builds the teamwork skills

so important to the workplace and community. When the lyric sheet is handed out, the groups can compare what they heard and wrote with the actual words.

Adult students enjoy writing responses to songs, either in class or at home. Possible responses include topics comparing music in the students' homeland with music in the United States. This assignment draws upon the knowledge and experiences that adult ESL learners bring to language learning and provides a known context for comparing and contrasting, often a difficult skill for beginning writers.

Many songs tell a story, and these stories can be rewritten or retold to practice narrative or summarizing skills or direct and reported speech. Students can also complete a writing prompt or answer a question from the point of view of the narrator or other characters in a song. For example, the Nancy Wilson song, "Guess Who I Saw Today" (1960) is sung by a wife catching her husband having a romantic lunch with another woman. The prompt could require the students to respond to the accusations in writing, saying what the husband might say.

Vocabulary Building Activities

Pop songs are written to be easily understood and enjoyed. As discussed above, they tend to use high frequency lyrics that have emotional content. This makes them strong candidates for word study or for reinforcing words already learned through written means. If a series of songs is to be used, students can be paired and given a song to teach the class.

However, the songs may also have idioms in them that might be difficult to explain, depending on the level of the students. For example, Cat Stevens' rendition of "Morning Has Broken" (1975) may appear initially to be a solid intermediate-level song that practices the present perfect tense. On closer examination, the expression "morning has broken" can be confusing to English language learners and may need to be discussed prior to listening to the song.

Cultural Knowledge Activities

Songs can be used in discussions of culture. They are a rich mine of information about human relations, ethics, customs, history, humor, and regional and cultural differences. A song can be part of a unit that also contains poems, video footage, or still photographs. Recordings of freedom songs from the civil rights movement can be a powerful accompaniment to watching Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech on video, for example.

Selecting Music

Songs should be carefully selected for the adult ESL classroom. Lems (1996) and Poppleton (2001), make the following suggestions:

1. Song lyrics should be clear and loud, not submerged in the instrumental music.
2. The vocabulary load for the song should be appropriate to the proficiency level. For example, Led Zepplin's "Stairway to Heaven" (1971)—with its vivid imagery and possibilities for multiple interpretations—might be successful with an advanced-level class. With other learners, however, its fast pace, obscure references, and lack of repetition could prove troublesome, as could the word inversion in lines such as, "There walks a lady we all know."
3. Songs should be pre-screened for potentially problematic content, such as explicit language, references to violent acts or sex, or inappropriate religious allusions.

Griffee (1990) recommends using short, slow songs for beginning-level students and discusses activities such as creating song word puzzles, drawing a song, or showing related pictures. With higher levels, he suggests using songs that tell stories, moving toward short, fast songs, and finally, longer, fast songs that have fewer high frequency vocabulary items.

Finding copies of song lyrics is not difficult. Many are available on the Internet, and many recordings contain lyric sheets. Beatles' songs such as "Yesterday" (1965) and "In My Life" (1966) have clear, direct lyrics and a timeless quality that make them appropriate with adult English language learners. Because teachers will show care and effort when presenting songs they are especially fond of, their favorites are also good. Finally, students are often strongly motivated to learn the lyrics of a new pop song or an old favorite they have heard and never understood, so their choices for classroom music should not be overlooked.

References

Eken, D. K. (1996). Ideas for using songs in the English language classroom. *English Teaching Forum, 34*(1), 46-47.

Griffee, D. T. (1990). Hey baby! Teaching short and slow songs in the ESL classroom. *TESL Reporter, 23*(4), 3-8.

Lems, K. (1996). *For a song: Music across the ESL curriculum.* Paper presented at the annual convention of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Chicago. (ED No. 396 524)

Maess, B., & Koelsch, S. (2001). Musical syntax is processed in Broca's area: An MEG study. *Nature Neuroscience 4*, 540-545.

Moi, C. M. (1994). Rock poetry: The literature our students listen to. *Journal of the Imagination in Language Learning, 2*, 56-59.

Moriya, Y. (1988). *English speech rhythm and its teaching to non-native speakers.* Paper presented at the annual convention of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages. Chicago. (ED No. 303 033)

Murphey, T. (1992).The discourse of pop songs. *TESOL Quarterly, 26*(4), 770-774.

Poppleton, C. (2001). Music to our ears. *American Language Review, 5*(1), 23-26.

Puhl, C. A. (1989). *Up from under: English training on the mines.* (Report on 1988 research project conducted at Gold Field Training Services). Stellenbosch, South Africa: University of Stellenbosch. (ED No. 335 864)

Rauscher, F. H., Shaw, G., & Ky, K. (1993). Mozart and spatial reasoning. *Nature, (365)* 611.

You may contact the author of this digest by emailing kristinlems@yahoo.com.

ERIC/NCLE Digests and Q&As are available free from NCLE, 4646 40th Street NW, Washington, DC 20016-1859; 202-362-0700 x200; email: ncle@cal.org; Web: http://www.cal.org/ncle/DIGESTS.

Documents with ED numbers can be ordered from ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS) at 1-800-443-ERIC (3742) or 703-440-1400; fax: 703-440-1408; email: service@edrs.com; Web: http://edrs.com.

The National Center for ESL Literacy Education (NCLE) is operated by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) with funding from the U.S. Department of Education (ED), Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), under Contract No. ED-99-CO-0008. The opinions expressed in this paper are not necessarily the positions or policies of ED. This document is in the public domain and may be reproduced without permission.